

WA STATE COUNTY ROAD ADMINISTRATION BOARD

The Issue of Accountability

THE GOVERNOR'S 2003 – 2005 BUDGET PROPOSAL

Governor Locke's proposed 2003 – 2005 budget includes the elimination of the County Road Administration Board (CRAB), the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB), and the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB). These three Boards would then be replaced with a new board, the Local Transportation Grant Board, which would have a grants-only focus.

Although the Governor expresses support for all of the existing programs administered by CRAB, TIB, and FMSIB, his proposal eliminates CRAB's primary program – that of ensuring the accountability of the 39 County Road Departments in the State of Washington.

The *Governor's Priorities for Transportation*, as discussed in his Budget Highlights, states that his proposal "continues efforts to strengthen and increase accountability in transportation spending and performance" and yet eliminates the successful measures used by CRAB for nearly forty years to ensure accountability in transportation spending and performance among the 39 local agencies that are responsible for nearly half of the total road miles of the entire statewide transportation system.

CRAB'S MISSION

The mission of the County Road Administration Board is to preserve and enhance the transportation infrastructure of Washington Counties by providing Standards of Good Practice, fair administration of funding programs, visionary leadership, and integrated, progressive, and professional technical services.

It is not by accident that the first of the four parts of the mission is related to the Standards of Good Practice.

CRAB'S STANDARDS OF GOOD PRACTICE

In 1965, CRAB was created by the legislature to provide regulatory oversight of the thirty-nine county road departments. RCW 36.78.020 requires CRAB to establish, by rule, Standards of Good Practice, which are defined in statute as "General and uniform practices formulated and adopted by the Board relating to the administration of county roads and the safe and efficient movement of people and goods over county roads, which shall apply to engineering, design procedures, maintenance, traffic control, safety, planning, programming, road classification, road inventories, budgeting and accounting procedures, management practices, equipment policies, personnel policies, and effective use of transportation-related technology."

In setting, maintaining, and verifying compliance with the Standards of Good Practice, CRAB has raised professionalism in County Road Departments. The return to the public on this investment in professionalism can probably never be calculated, but it surely exists in two main forms – dollars saved or better spent, and increased trust of county government by the public.

The current Standards are contained in WAC 136-12 through 136-70 and cover the following topics:

- Vacancy in the position of County Engineer
- Priority programming procedures
- Procedures for the preparation of Six-Year Transportation Programs
- Annual Road Program, Construction Report, and Day Labor Limits
- Day labor construction
- Inspection of bridges on county roads
- Procedures for processing of county road accident reports
- Work performed for other agencies by county road departments
- Accommodation of utilities on county road rights-of-way
- Maintenance of the county roadlog
- Adoption of written policies relating to Road Department operation by the county legislative authority
- Implementation and maintenance of a Pavement Management System as a prerequisite for receiving County Arterial Preservation dollars

In order to help counties to comply with the standards, CRAB provides a variety of resources and assistance.

Recently, increased attention has been focused on the need for maintenance and preservation of existing transportation infrastructure. We have heard this from the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation, in the new financial reporting requirements of the Government Accounting Standards Board, and through various Washington State legislative proposals. Because of CRAB's Standards of Good Practice, counties are able to accurately demonstrate the effectiveness of their maintenance and construction programs.

ANNUAL CERTIFICATION

In order to assure that counties adhere to the Standards of Good Practice, CRAB conducts an Annual Certification of each county. The purpose of Annual Certification is to verify that counties "have reasonably complied with provisions of law relating to county road administration and with the Standards of Good Practice as formulated and adopted by the CRABoard." (WAC 136-04-010)

Annually, each County Engineer and either the Chair of the Board of County Commissioners or the County Executive must certify that the county has operated in compliance with the Standards of Good Practice. A complete county audit includes not only the Annual Certification but also an annual Bridge Inspection Report and biennial performance audits.

County compliance is audited at three levels:

At the County Level

<u>Task</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Perform Official County Visits to conduct performance audits♦ Require Annual Certification♦ Require Annual Certification of Road Levy♦ Require Annual Construction Program and Six-Year Transportation Improvement Plans♦ Require County Arterial Preservation Program♦ Conduct Annual Roadlog updates♦ Require submittal of Road Fund budgets♦ Require submittal of County Road policies♦ Review County audits performed by the State Auditor's Office♦ Review County Road and Street Reports submitted to WSDOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ To ensure Management and Administrative compliance with RCW 36.80♦ To ensure compliance with Standards of Good Practice♦ To ensure compliance with Road Fund diversion statutes♦ To ensure that programs comply with statutes and that they are feasible♦ To ensure compliance with Pavement Management System requirements♦ To ensure compliance with statutes and authorize State Treasurer to distribute gas tax funds♦ To ensure fiscal accountability♦ To ensure accountability of County Road Departments to County Legislative Authorities♦ To ensure appropriate use of Road Fund moneys♦ To ensure accuracy and to compile consistent statewide financial data

At the County Road Project Level

<u>Task</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Perform Project Management reviews♦ Review Rural Arterial Project prospectuses♦ Review Rural Arterial Project payment vouchers♦ Perform on-site project inspections♦ Require Annual County Arterial Preservation year-end reports♦ Review Annual Construction Reports for Day Labor Limits compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ To ensure project compliance with Rural Arterial Program statutes and rules♦ To ensure project compliance with Rural Arterial Program rules♦ To ensure complete and accurate reporting of how Rural Arterial Program funds are spent♦ To ensure that projects are constructed in accordance with approved standards♦ To ensure project compliance with County Arterial Preservation Program statutes and rules♦ To ensure that projects comply with statutes regarding use of Road Fund and Day Labor limits

At the County Budget and Road Fund Level

<u>Task</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ Require Sheriff's Annual Certification of Road Levy Expenditures♦ Require Annual Certification of Road Fund expenditures for Fish Passage Barrier Removal♦ Require Annual Certification of Road Levy♦ Require submittal of Road Fund budgets♦ Review County Audits performed by the State Auditor's Office♦ Require Annual Construction Program and Six-Year Transportation Improvement Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ To ensure compliance with Road Fund diversion statutes♦ To ensure compliance with statutes limiting the use of Road Funds for fish passage projects♦ To ensure compliance with Road Fund diversion statutes♦ To ensure compliance with Rural Arterial Program eligibility rules♦ To ensure appropriate use of Road Fund moneys♦ To ensure that fiscal aspects of the programs comply with statute and that they are feasible

WHY IS CRAB ESSENTIAL TO THE COUNTIES?

- ↑ CRAB provides for accurate and consistent reporting of the statewide county roadlog. The thirty-nine counties currently report directly to CRAB so that the fuel tax can be distributed fairly and equitably. The county road system accounts for about 50% of the road surface centerline miles in the State of Washington. This system, as administered by CRAB for more than fuel tax calculations, is one of the only systems in the state with consistent accountability. The roadlog is used for more than determining grant eligibility.
 - ↓ A new board whose primary focus is on grants will not have the resources to continue providing accountability for county roadlog data. Ensuring that data in the roadlog are accurate is an accountability function that would necessarily be eliminated when funding for the FTEs that perform the function is eliminated.
- ↑ Through the constant assistance of CRAB, the thirty-nine counties have the training and guidance necessary to help them maintain status as Certification Acceptance agencies (CA), which allows them to administer their own federally funded projects. This function is tailored to the specific needs of Counties, and may not continue if combined with other organizations, directed toward the goals of municipalities.
 - ↓ If CA were lost, WSDOT Local Programs would have to administer County projects built with federal funds, as they do now for cities that do not have CA. This additional activity by WSDOT would increase its costs, thereby eliminating at least part of the projected savings.
- ↑ CRAB is one of the most efficient and cost effective organizations in the State, with a high degree of accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness. This is accomplished through a rigorous set of reporting and regulatory functions.
 - ↓ Taxpayers will suffer a loss in the efficiency and accountability of their County Road Departments and County road systems if CRAB's accountability program is eliminated or diminished.
- ↑ Washington is the only state out of the 50 states that has an organization like CRAB, allowing the counties to be self-directed and Washington counties are up to the task – they understand the value of accountability for their transportation programs. County agencies within many of the adjacent or nearby states are envious of the efficiency and accountability that CRAB enables Washington counties to provide. The effectiveness of CRAB's accountability efforts are recognized by others but not necessarily by some Washington state leaders.
 - ↓ Washington State Counties would be no better than those of other states in ensuring accountability for transportation spending and performance.
- ↑ Only one employee of CRAB is responsible for administering the grant funding and the current grant application is only one page in length. Virtually all other CRAB staff are involved in support and services related to County Road Department accountability.
 - ↓ It would be difficult to streamline CRAB's grants administration function, regardless of what type of new board were to be created.
- ↑ TIB grants are focused on urban projects, while CRAB grants are focused on rural projects. The two grant processes are vastly different.
 - ↓ It will be virtually impossible to create a single application process that fairly addresses the needs of both urban and rural projects.
- ↑ Neither TIB nor FMSIB has the local input or regional project selection criteria necessary for regional prioritization. Decisions regarding prioritization are made by individuals in Olympia, with little or no local or regional input. CRAB's grant program recognizes that project

prioritization needs to occur on a regional basis to reflect the regional needs of the state transportation system.

- ↓ Individual projects will receive grant funding with no regard for local or regional input and prioritization.
- ↑ CRAB was formed out of the need to make Counties more accountable for the expenditure of Road Funds.
 - ↓ With the elimination of the accountability program, counties will have stepped back nearly forty years.
- ↑ CRAB is funded out of the Counties' portion of the fuel tax revenue in an effort to generate greater accountability. Before any fuel tax is distributed to counties and cities, a portion (1 1/2 % from counties and 1 1/2 % from cities) is distributed to WSDOT for "State Supervision". CRAB receives 36% of the county portion, most of which is used for administrative services and technical support related to the proper functioning of the accountability program.
 - ↓ WSDOT would retain all of the State Supervision money but would not have the mandate to provide the services currently provided by CRAB. There is no cost savings.

CONCLUSION

The counties prefer to keep CRAB as it is today. They believe that they presently obtain much more in services and support than they expend through the State Supervision money. Even if that small amount of gas tax were to be returned to them (not a given with the Governor's proposed new board), they could not afford to individually replace the services that CRAB provides. One county says it sees CRAB's services as an extension of its own staff – worth about two FTEs, but providing a range of services that it could not hire any two employees to provide.

CRAB does much more than administer grant programs. Its sole mission when it was created in 1965 continues to be its primary mission today – to ensure that the 39 County Road Departments of Washington State are fully accountable for transportation spending and performance within their counties.

- ➔ CRAB provides training for County Engineers, Public Works Directors, and key management staff to ensure that they recognize and adhere to the statutory and professional requirements and responsibilities of their positions.
- ➔ CRAB provides comprehensive on-site and telephone support for any and all questions related to the operation of County Road Departments and performance of engineering and management duties.
- ➔ CRAB assists counties as requested in hiring key staff by screening resumes, providing interview questions, and participating on interview panels.
- ➔ CRAB drafts model ordinances, resolutions, policies, and documents that can be adapted to individual county situations.

In short, CRAB regulates and ensures accountability by providing tools that enable the counties to improve professionalism.

Many of the Counties feel this proposal will significantly diminish their effectiveness at maintaining, rebuilding, and replacing their road systems. One of the primary reasons the counties can plan, design, and build a transportation project in a timely and cost effective manner is due to the assistance of County Road Administration Board.